

Cold, storm pack a punch

By Lisa D. Connell
Clipper Editor
editor@duxburyclipper.com

Flooded streets and the interiors of some homes. Bone-chilling temperatures. Biting winds. Snow falling at an angle. All of these natural elements combined over a three-day period – from Thursday to Saturday – to pound Duxbury, particularly the Snug Harbor business district and homes along King Caesar Avenue, Pine Point Road, Bay Road and St. George Street “The storm itself dealt us a lot of twists,” Peter Buttkus, director of Duxbury’s Department of Public Works, said. Thursday’s storm started as rain, soaking the ground with about an inch and a half of water, then it changed over to snow and temperatures dropped causing an instant flash freeze, said Buttkus.

Single-digit temperatures led to the frozen ground unable to absorb the precipitation. The water had nowhere to go. A near full moon and record high tides compounded the storm, named Grayson.

“I saw areas of the town flood that I’ve never seen flood in 24 years of working here,” Peter Buttkus, director of Duxbury’s Department of Public Works, said.

The flooding stood out for Duxbury Fire Department Captain Rob Reardon. Firefighters answered multiple calls.

“We ran almost 40 calls in 24 hours,” said Reardon. This included checking on residents in houses on King Caesar and Pine Point roads. Firefighters in survival suits checked on people in several homes. The rising water came up around the flagpole in the Blue Fish area and up St. George Street. Three brush breaker trucks helped firefighters make it to the hardest hit areas of Duxbury.

There was an accident involving a fire vehicle, Reardon confirmed. There were no injuries to its driver.

Joan Sullivan, of 15 Surplus St., in an email wrote that she watched Eversource Energy repair crews on scene all afternoon at the Washington Street end of Surplus Street from Wednesday to Thursday night. A tree limb damaged a high voltage power line. Power was restored three hours later at 6:30 p.m.

Resident Michael Wood of 11 Starboard Way, driving to French Memories bakery with his son, noted that “the tide was literally rising over the parking lot of bay side moving huge ice chunks, and was rising so fast that in minutes several feet of water was over the road for hundreds of feet. To see this happen on land was astonishing,” he said in an email. “We quickly backed up and entered from Harrison Street and found the harbormaster shed was abandoned and all access to the town pier, yacht club, Island Creek Oysters shop, and Duxbury Maritime School was flooded – the water was above the docks and now washing onto the land at a very fast rate.

“We then drove to Blue Fish to find the water had risen so much the bridge was impassable and the ice was flowing into the land pushed by the tide, ice the size of small cars weighing thousands of pounds, each piling up. We then turned around and headed back down Harrison Street and later to the high school.”

We couldn’t make it to the flag pole by the bridge for the road was flooded and ice and debris rising so fast into and past the bridge and the overflowing Blue Fish River.”

The pair headed home in the car, able to do so without being flooded with salt water.

DPW crews worked around the weekend treating the town's roads, plowing and scraping. A mix of salt, sand and magnesium chloride helped and yet, Buttkus said, when temps drop below 20 degrees, salt basically stops working. It was bumpy on some roads on Saturday, due to the built up ice and snow pack. Temps rose to the 20s on Monday and gave road crews the break needed to scrape some of the snow pack away. "Hopefully we're on the rebound now," he said. At the height of the storm, 33 DPW employees, including the highway, water and cemetery departments, battled the wintry elements. Over the weekend, that number dropped to 13. Damage from falling trees and tree limbs due to wind force did not prove as severe as projected, Buttkus said.

On Monday and Tuesday, the higher temperatures in the 20 and 30-degree range felt balmy compared to the bitter cold gripping the South Shore after Christmas.

Now, getting road salt is an issue, to replenish what's been used so far. The source is a salt mine in Chelsea. "Deliveries are very slow, it's concerning," Buttkus said.

Meanwhile, as the town recovers from last week's storm, winter remains – officially until March 20.

One of the best strategies to get through the winter months is driving slower.

"It is winter and you do need to slow your speeds down," said Buttkus. "And give the plow trucks plenty of room."